



presents the Fall 2017

COLLOQUIA SERIES

NEW RESEARCH ON WOMEN AND GENDER

GLOBAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

FRIDAY, October 6

1:30-3:00PM

303 INTERNATIONAL CENTER

Emily Conroy-Krutz

Department of History

Elizabeth Pierce and Benevolent Femininity: Gender and Reform in 19th-Century America

In 1816, a twelve year-old girl named Elizabeth Pierce wrote a letter to her mother, describing the “new Society in this town composed of young ladies.” She had joined, and sent her mother an oiled paper lantern that the society had been making with the goal of raising money to help young men prepare for the ministry. From a very young age, Pierce and other girls like her were being raised up to the work of benevolence and its particular interpretation of femininity. By the time she was a young woman, she had moved on from making lanterns to participating in the movements for temperance, missions, and religious revivalism. Women like Pierce are often remembered as setting the stage for the women’s rights movement, but Pierce did not follow that path. Rather, like many others of her generation, Pierce’s benevolence led to a life that was socially (and at times politically) engaged, but also conservative. Using Pierce’s extensive diaries and family papers, this presentation examines the complex dynamics of benevolent femininity in 19th century America, with a focus on the ways that Pierce’s religious beliefs shaped her activism and her understanding of the role of women in American society.

Emily Conroy-Krutz is an Assistant Professor in the History Department at Michigan State University, where she teaches courses on the history of American women, foreign relations, Revolutionary America, and religion in American politics. She is the author of *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Cornell, 2015).

This event is free and open to the public.